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OUR COLORED PLATE.

STUDY IN PERSIAN AND MORESCUE STYLES AND COLORS.

FROM the time of the great Cyrus to that of Shah Abbas (A.D. 1582), the manufactures of Persia ranked with the most finished, the most valuable and the truly unique of the world; and from this latter period to the present day, it has been the custom to regard Persia and Persian products, as standing alone amidst all other nations and things in the attractiveness of mystery and the incomparable quality of workmanship. With the one possible exception of the importation of Chinese porcelain in the 16th and 17th centuries, and of cashmere shawls about the same period, no foreign suggestions or ideas were permitted to invade or influence the Persian manufacture.

The successors and followers of Mahomed were after all but rude Bedouins, who gradually acquired culture from contact with the more refined countries which they overran. The powerful Abbaside Khalifs of Bagdad no doubt summoned to their court men of science and learning from all countries under their sway. Persia furnished them with architects and other artists. Skilled Persian workmen were no doubt employed in large numbers in decorating the mosques and palaces in the Arab capital, situated as it was, on the very frontier of their own country. Hence, we believe, arose the so-called Arabian or Arabesque style of ornament, afterwards so widely spread and now so well known.

Wall tiles were used at a very early period, as fragments of them are found amid the ruins of Rhages, destroyed some 600 years ago. None seem to have been made since the reign of Shah Abbas, and the art is now completely lost.

Like the earthenware, of which they were imitations, they appear at first to have been made with an even surface without relief. Inscriptions and other ornaments in relief were added at a later period. They were chiefly used as monumental tombstones of the graves of saints, and for embellishing the domes and walls of mosques and other sacred buildings. Most of them date from the time of the Mogul sovereigns of Persia, such as Malik Shah (A.D. 1072), Hulaku Khan (1256), Ghazan Khan (1295), and of the Sefavean Kings down to Shah Abbas. Some of them are said to be of good size, as much as six or eight feet in length. Of the smaller uninscribed tiles, most of them are either cross or star-shaped. Tiles of these two shapes were fitted together, so as to form a mosaic, the stars of one color and the crosses of another. Frequently these tiles bore a verse or chapter from the Koran.

Wall tiles have continued in general use in Persia until the present day. Sometimes each brick contains a whole design in flowers or figures; sometimes the design covers several bricks, but more usually the pattern is formed by a mosaic of

small tiles, each of only one color. Different kinds of tiles are used for floors, plinths, &c., in private houses.

The pendant stalactite work used in vaults and niches is of Persian origin.

The conditions of the Mahomedan law were stringent; in endless designs in marquetry, mosaic or in stucco, there was to be no image of a living thing, vegetable or animal. Such conditions led to a very individual style of decoration, for vegetable forms were now excluded for the first time. However, the artists while thus restricted, soon became sufficiently skilful to make light of such exclusions, and the exertions of ingenuity which

signs are composed of flower forms disguised. This is especially the case in the later works of the Alhambra, still no actual flower occurs, as the exclusion of all natural images is the foundation of the style.

The omission of the crescent is worth notice. It now crowns the great mosques of Constantinople, but it is not to be found in any early work. One of the greatest remaining works of the combined Byzantine and Moresque, is the magnificent Mosque of Touloun, at Cairo, a monument of the Ninth century (876 A.D.) and the recorded work of a Greek. With the Moresque tracery and inscriptions and other peculiar forms, we have

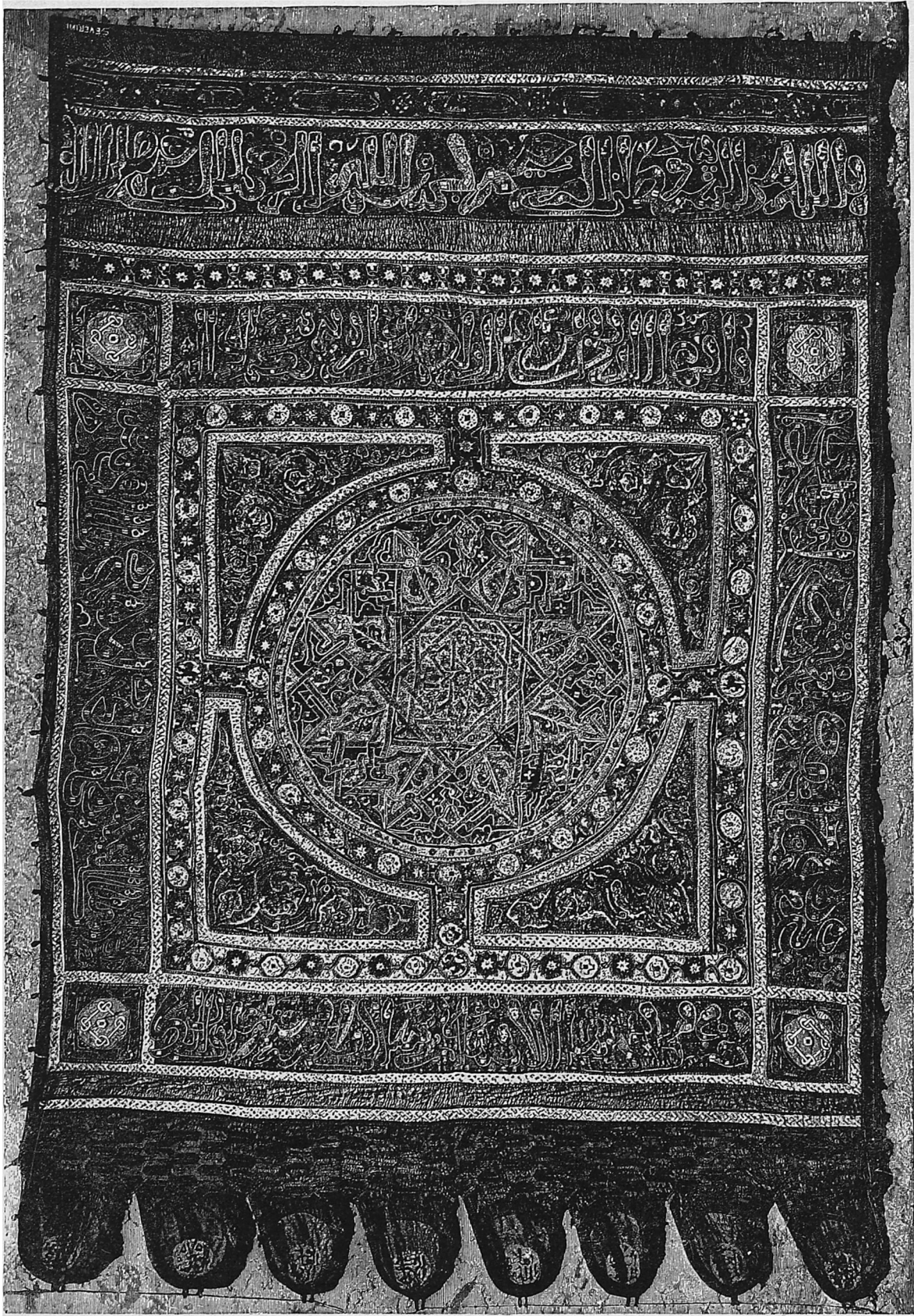
combined several of the most popular ancient ornaments in their Byzantine garb, but somewhat more than ordinarily modified, as the fret, anthemion, the guilloche, the horns of plenty and the fleur-de-lis. The disguised conventional foliage is very beautifully elaborated in some of the accessory works of this Mosque. They became standard in after ages, for the details of the diaper-tiles of the Alhambra, executed some five hundred years afterwards, are in many respects nearly identical with these details of the Mosque of Touloun.

In all these early Arabian buildings of Cairo, there is the pointed arch, which appears first in the great Mosque of Amrou, 641, A.D.; but the ogee, the crescent and the scalloped arches are more characteristic of Moorish architecture generally, as the pointed arch has been made familiar by a late style; but the simple round Romanesque arch also occurs in the Moorish works of Spain. This style became gradually richer as it advanced westwards from Egypt to Sicily, and especially in Spain, where the Alhambra, a work of the Fourteenth century, still remains to be witness to its unparalleled richness of detail.

The Moresque was the period of gorgeous diapers, for their habit of decoration of the entire surfaces of their apartments was peculiarly favorable to the development of this class of design. The Alhambra displays almost endless specimens, and all are in relief enriched with gold and color, chiefly blue and red. Some give the

idea of being more endurable imitations of the rich woollens or cashmeres which the Arabs always made great store of. The Genoa damasks, Arras tapestries and modern wall paper, are all imitations, more or less, of these wall diapers. The very word "damask" means Damascus work, and Damascus was famous for fabrics before its conquest by the Arabs.

The artists of the Alhambra were probably exclusively Moorish. The beauty of the place is in its general richness of effect, in its endless combinations of columns, arches and gorgeous surfaces, its gold and silver flowers, and its intricate tracery, which all combine to give the impression of extraordinary splendor as a whole, though to particularize it might be difficult to select any one part for unlimited praise. The Alhambra does not exhibit that Byzantine character in its details which we find in Sicily or the Mosques of Cairo.



MOORISH STANDARD CAPTURED FROM MOHAMMED ABEN YUSSUD BY ALFONSO VIII., OF CASTILE.

they impelled, gave rise to a more beautiful ornamental style than perhaps any that had preceded it, for there was no division of the artistic mind now between meaning and effect, and although the religious cycles and other symbolic figures, which had hitherto engrossed so much artistic attention were excluded, the more conventional ornamental symbolism, the ordinary forms borrowed from the classic periods and geometrical symmetry, left an abundant field behind.

Mere curves and angles or interlacings in the Moresque form bear the chief burden of design, but distinguished by a variety of colors; the curves however, very naturally fell into standard forms and floral shapes, and the lines and angles were soon developed into a very characteristic species of tracing or interlaced strap work. And although flowers were not palpably admitted, the great mass of the minor details of Moresque de-



ANCIENT COLORING AND STYLES OF DECORATION APPLIED TO MODERN USES.

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